

Message Text

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ACTION A-01

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R 091220Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8633

WHITE HOUSE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 07004

DEPT FOR A AND WE, VICE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE FOR
CAPTAIN HOWE

E.O. 1L652: N/A

TAGS: OVIP (NELSON A. ROCKEFELLER) FR

SUBJECT: LAFAYETTE GRAVESIDE REMARKS

1. TO HIS AMERICAN CONTEMPORARIES MARIE-JOSEPH-GILBERT DU MOTIER, MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE, MUST HAVE APPEARED TO STEP STRAIGHT FROM THE PAGES OF A STORY BOOK. (TWO CENTURIES LATER WE WOULD SAY STRAIGHT FROM HOLLYWOOD CENTRAL CASTING.) HE WAS YOUNG AND RICH, BRAVE AND IMPETUOUS, GLAMOROUSLY TITLED AND GORGEOUSLY UNIFORMED -- A MARQUIS AMONG THE MINUTEMEN, SERVING WITHOUT PAY OR PROSPECT OF MATERIAL REWARD. REAL AS ALL THIS WAS, IT WAS THE STUFF THAT MYTHS ARE MADE OF. LAFAYETTE WAS A HERO BEFORE HE WAS 25, AND A LEGEND BEFORE HE WAS THIRTY. THE SWATH THAT HE CUT ACROSS THE FIRST HALF-DECADE OF AMERICAN HISTORY HAS LEFT THE NAME LAFAYETTE ON 42 AMERICAN COMMUNITIES AND INNUMERABLE STREETS, PARKS AND SCHOOLS.

2. I KNOW OF NO HISTORIAN WHO BEGRUDGES LAFAYETTE HIS LARGE PLACE IN AMERICAN HISTORY AND AMERICAN HEARTS. HE EARNED THEM. FOR IT TOOK GUTS FOR THE YOUNG FRENCH NOBLEMAN TO THROW IN HIS LOT WITH THE REBELLIOUS COLONISTS IN EARLY 1777. THE AMERICAN CAUSE WAS
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SUFFERING REVERSE AFTER REVERSE. FAMILY AND KING WERE

FLATLY OPPOSED TO LAFAYETTE'S PLAN TO TAKE UP ARMS IN THE REBEL CAUSE. HE HAD TO SNEAK OUT OF FRANCE. NOT SURPRISINGLY GEORGE WASHINGTON WAS SKEPTICAL WHEN THE YOUNG FRENCH NOBLEMAN APPEARED IN PHILADELPHIA IN JUNE 1777. BUT DESPITE HIS TENDER AGE -- LAFAYETTE WAS BARELY TWENTY AT THE TIME -- HE PERSUADED WASHINGTON TO GIVE HIM AN OPPORTUNITY TO PROVE HIS ABILITIES. LAFAYETTE ACQUITTED HIMSELF WITH SUCH DISTINCTION IN HIS FIRST MILITARY ACTION -- THE BATTLE OF BRANDYWINE, IN WHICH HE WAS SERIOUSLY WOUNDED -- THAT UPON HIS RECOVERY WASHINGTON GAVE HIM COMMAND OF A DIVISION. LAFAYETTE HAD JUST TURNED TWENTY-ONE. HE WAS THE YOUNGEST FIELD COMMANDER IN THE AMERICAN ARMY, AND PROBABLY IN THE WORLD.

3. BUT LIKE ALL STORY-BOOK HEROES LAFAYETTE WAS TESTED AND TEMPERED BY ADVERSITY. FOR TWO YEARS HE SHARED WITH WASHINGTON THE LONG MARCHES AND LONGER RETREATS OF THE CONTINENTAL ARMY -- AND ITS WINTER AT VALLEY FORGE. THANKS IN PART TO LAFAYETTE'S LOBBYING AT COURT, LOUIS XVI AGREED TO SEND AN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE TO NORTH AMERICA; BUT TO LAFAYETTE'S BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT, IT WAS THE OLDER, MORE EXPERIENCED COMTE DE ROCHAMBEAU WHO WAS GIVEN COMMAND.

4. AMERICANS' STRONGEST MENTAL IMAGE OF LAFAYETTE IS OF THE YOUNG GENERAL STANDING WITH WASHINGTON AND ROCHAMBEAU AT YORKTOWN -- TRIUMPHANT, THE GAMBLE PLAYED OUT AND WON, HIS PLACE IN HISTORY ASSURED AT AN AGE MOST YOUNG MEN ARE STILL DECIDING WHICH DREAMS OF GLORY TO DREAM. AFTER YORKTOWN LAFAYETTE WENT ON TO A DISTINGUISHED CAREER IN HIS NATIVE LAND, AND DIED, WREATHED IN FAME AND HONOR AT AGE 77. BUT FOR AMERICANS HE WILL ALWAYS BE 24-YEARS-OLD. WE DO NOT WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE CORPULENCE HE HAD ADDED BY THE TIME HE TOOK COMMAND OF THE FRENCH NATIONAL GUARD AFTER THE FALL OF THE BASTILLE. IT WAS ANOTHER LAFAYETTE, WEARING WRINKLES WE NEVER KNEW, WHO HELPED LOUIS PHILIPPE TO THE THRONE IN JULY 1830. OUR LAFAYETTE, LIKE THE FIGURES ON KEATS' GRECIAN URN, UNCLASSIFIED

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IS "FOREVER PANTING AND FOREVER YOUNG."

5. LAFAYETTE HAS UNQUESTIONABLY BEEN AMERICA'S FAVORITE FRENCHMAN FOR EIGHT GENERATIONS. BUT WE SHOULD BE UNDER NO ILLUSIONS ABOUT HIS ORIGINAL MOTIVES IN THROWING HIMSELF INTO THE AMERICAN ADVENTURE. ALTHOUGH BY THE END OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAY HE HAD BECOME A CONVINCED REPUBLICAN AND A SHAMELESS AMERICA-

LOVER, IT WAS NOT LOVE OF LIBERTY OR THE YANKEES WHICH
SENT HIM TO THE NEW WORLD IN 1777; IT WAS HATRED OF

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ACTION A-01

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8634

WHITE HOUSE

UNCLAS SECTION 02 OF 02 PARIS 07004

THE BRITISH, REINFORCED BY A YOUNG MAN'S THIRST FOR
ADVENTURE. LAFAYETTE SHARED THE VIRULENT ANGLOPHOBIE
OF THE FRENCH MILITARY CASTE OF THAT AND LATER
CENTURIES. INDEED HIS OWN FATHER HAD BEEN KILLED BY
THE BRITISH AND THE BATTLE OF MINDEN. BUT THERE CAN BE
NO DOUBT ABOUT HIS LATER CONVERSION. IN 1782, WHEN AN
AMBITIOUS FRANCO-SPANISH EXPEDITION WAS BEING PLANNED
TO RECAPTURE JAMAICA AND CANADA, LAFAYETTE'S NAME WAS
PROPOSED AS GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF JAMAICA. KING
CHARLES III OF SPAIN VETOED THE SUGGESTION: "NONON.
NON. NON. JE NE VEUX PAS QU'IL RESTE LA; IT Y FERAIT
UNE REPUBLIQUE." AND AS FOR HIS AMERICANISM, HE IS HIS
OWN BEST WITNESS. ON LEAVING OUR SHORES FOR THE LAST
TIME, HE SAID: "GOD BLESS THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, EACH OF
THEIR STATES, AND THEIR FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. ACCEPT
THIS PATRIOTIC FAREWELL OF AN OVER-FLOWING HEART. SUCH
WILL BE ITS LAST THROB WHEN IT CEASES TO BEAT."

6. IN THIS BICENTENNIAL YEAR I AM HONORED TO JOIN THE
THOUSANDS OF MY FELLOW COUNTRYMEN, WHO, OVER THE
YEARS, HAVE COME, PILGRIMS AND PATRIOTS, TO THIS

GRAVESIDE. OUTSIDE OUR BORDERS THERE IS PROBABLY NO
PATCH OF EARTH DEARER TO AMERICAN HEARTS OR MORE SACRED
TO OUR TRADITIONS THAN WHERE WE ARE STANDING TODAY.
THE AMERICAN FLAG HAS FLOWN UNINTERRUPTED OVER THIS
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SPOT EVER SINCE THE MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE WAS BURIED
HERE 142 YEARS AGO -- UNDER SOIL BROUGHT SPECIALLY
FROM VIRGINIA. AND IN THE CENTURIES TO COME I KNOW THAT
THIS CEREMONY, THIS HOMMAGE, WILL BE REPEATED BY OTHER
AMERICANS AS YET UNBORN. FOR AS PRESIDENT MONROE SAID
TO LAFAYETTE BEFORE THE AMERICAN CONGRESS A CENTURY AND
A HALF AGO: "YOU ARE OURS, GENERAL, AND AFTER US YOU
WILL BEONG TO OUR CHILDREN, AND AFTER THEM, TO THE
CHILDREN OF OUR CHILDREN FOREVER..."

7. THANK YOU.
RUSH

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